

County News and Views

OCTOBER 2001

From the Office of Fifth District Supervisor Jerry Eaves

Anthrax Advisory

Intentional anthrax exposures in various parts of our country have created concern and fear among the general public. San Bernardino County fire and public health agencies are prepared to cope with the crisis.

Several years ago San Bernardino County public safety and public health agencies and other local agencies formed the Terrorism Early Warning Group and the Terrorism Oversight Committee and have met regularly. Subsequently, county agencies are coping effectively with the worry, and the county remains anthrax-free.

Since October 12, 2001, the San Bernardino County Department of Public Health has tested 47 samples of substances recovered by public safety agencies – primarily the San Bernardino County Fire Department's Hazardous Materials Division – after being summoned by residents and businesses who discovered items they considered to be suspicious.

None of these items have tested positive for anthrax or any other harmful biological agent. None of the incidents are being investigated as crimes.

San Bernardino County Public health officials want to remind the public that there has yet to be a genuine case of intentional biological infection in California during this recent period of concern. While the public has been advised by various agencies to be aware of suspicious items, County officials are also urging the public to use common sense before becoming alarmed and calling in the authorities. The intentional anthrax incidents that have occurred so far have not targeted the general public.

People who believe they may have discovered a hazardous material are advised to:

- Place the item into a plastic bag or some other type of container and seal it.
- If contact is made, wash hands with soap and warm water.
- Make a note of anyone who might have come in contact with the material.
- Dial 911.
- Additional information on anthrax threats can be found at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention web site.
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/Agent/Anthrax/Anthrax.asp>

If someone believes they have been exposed to anthrax, the most important thing to do is remain calm. To cause an infection, anthrax must be rubbed into broken skin, swallowed or inhaled. After illness develops, it can be spread from one person to another. Symptoms resembling those of the common cold usually would not appear for about seven days, and the more severe symptoms – breathing difficulty and shock – would not appear until several days later.

“Early treatment with antibiotics is very effective in treating anthrax,” said Dr. Eric K Frykman, Chief of Preventive Medical Services for San Bernardino County. “People who feel they may have been exposed to anthrax or who feel their common cold symptoms may be something more serious should contact their personal physician. Clinical laboratories used by physicians in the County can culture the organism that causes anthrax and can get help from Public Health if needed. Panicking and demanding emergency treatment could put unnecessary strain on our emergency health care system.”

San Bernardino County agencies will continue to monitor national and local events, respond to calls for assistance, and issue further advisories as needed. The Division of Preventive Medical Services may be contacted by calling (909) 387-6220.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

National Family Volunteer Day

Saturday, November 17, 2001

Call the Volunteer Center of the Inland Empire at (909) 884-2556 for details and non-profit agencies needing volunteers.

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